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- ART. V.—1. *Cours de la Littérature Française*. Par M. VILLEMMAIN. 3^e édition. Paris: Didier. 1841.
2. *Histoire de l'Influence de Shakespeare sur le Théâtre Français jusqu'à nos Jours*. Par ALBERT LACROIX. *Mémoire couronné au Concours institué par le Gouvernement Belge entre les Universités du Royaume*. (Année 1854–55.) Bruxelles: Th. Lesigne. 1856.

WE are taught in our very school-books to observe the influence which the French language and literature have exerted upon the English; but even our literary historians do not measure the power which the thinkers of England have wielded in France. We learn in our childhood that the cultivated minds of France have been for centuries contributing to the intellectual wealth of all writers and speakers of the English tongue; but we are not told what England has been doing for the land from which she received a large element of her language, and many a germ of thought that she has developed into forms of surpassing beauty. We are obliged to look to works in the French for the little assistance that we are able to find in tracing the successive steps by which our literature has made its way to the private *salons* and the academic halls of prejudiced Paris, and there gained a permanent foothold. But we are acquainted with no treatise which is devoted to a full consideration of the reciprocal relations of the English and the French literature. Such a work must yet be written. We must discern the intellectual ties which, through all the political contests of France and England, have helped to bind these two great nations together.

The public have long since expressed their gratitude to M. Villemain for the chaste and scholarly lectures in which he showed the indebtedness of some of his countrymen to their neighbors across the Channel. A work like that of M. Lacroix should certainly not remain unnoticed by those who speak the “tongue that Shakespeare spake.” The earnest zeal and the thorough research of the author, the general lucidness of his style, and the fairness of spirit with

which he discusses his subject, all commend his work to our most favorable notice, and prove that his essay was worthily crowned by the Belgian government. We think that his ardent love of Shakespeare leads him sometimes to over-estimate the poet's influence upon French minds; but English and American readers will have charity for a fault of that nature. Acknowledging our indebtedness to him for many of the facts which we shall give, we proceed to consider, as fully as our limits will allow, the influence of the English literature upon the French.

So far as we know, the earliest French writer who intimated to his countrymen that the English language contained any works worthy of their attention was the celebrated exile, St. Evremond. He was the first of his nation to discover English literature. He saw it but dimly, and never explored it himself. Indeed, he refused to learn the English language. But he was a member of the brilliant circle who gathered around the Duke of Buckingham, and he was especially intimate with that accomplished nobleman. In the frequent reunions of that learned company he used to hear analyses and criticisms of the plays which were then represented on the London stage, and he often engaged in animated discussions upon literary questions. One of the most prominent topics that arrested his attention was the difference between the English and the French conception of the drama. He embodied the results of his reflections in a striking Letter upon Tragedy, in which he most clearly set forth a prime defect in the dramatic productions of the French. He showed them that the strong and natural expression of passion could not be found in their artificial and conventional pieces. "In this letter," says Voltaire, "he put his finger on the sore of our drama." So great was his admiration for the English drama, which he could not read, that he wrote a play with the title, "Sir Politick Would Be, *à la Manière des Anglais.*"

In 1698, Lafosse, one of his contemporaries, and a writer of considerable reputation in his time, placed upon the stage a play called "Manlius," which is said to be a manifest imitation of Otway's *Venice Preserved*. Lacroix also finds in

one passage traces of familiarity with the words of Portia. Twenty-five years later Lamotte-Houdard presented to the public a series of plays, in which he aimed to illustrate the true principles of the dramatic art. He waged war upon the unities; he omitted the customary monologues and introductory scenes; he dispensed with the confidants, and strove to gain a freedom and naturalness to which the French had been strangers. He seems to have heard that his cherished ideas were prevalent in England, though he was, like all his countrymen, personally unacquainted with English literature. He was a far better critic than poet. The essays, which were prefixed to his plays, have proved to be of more value than the plays themselves. In theory he anticipated by a century the new Romantic School of France. He opened the discussion which led to the introduction of Shakespeare into his country, and to the essential modification of a large part of French literature.

About the same time the comic writer Destouches was in London, in the suite of Cardinal Dubois. He was at once attracted by the English drama, and especially by the *Tempest*. He translated several scenes of that piece into French verse, and accompanied them with a dedicatory letter to the Marquise de Pompadour. He says that the art of Shakespeare is "à perpetual enchantment." "And what incidents," he continues, "can we not introduce by means of this enchantment! How fortunate we comic writers of France should be, if we were allowed to employ so convenient an art! But as soon as we take our imagination as a model, we are pitilessly hissed." He afterwards showed, in his *Dissipateur* and his *Tambour Nocturne*, that he had not forgotten Timon of Athens and Addison's Drummer.

A couple of lines from a comedy by Boissy indicate that the taste for English studies was becoming more common. One of the characters, speaking of a marquis who was fond of novelties, says:—

"Son transport l'autre jour était l'anglomanie ;
Au-dessus de Corneille il mettait Shakespeare."

We know, also that the English-French Dictionary and

Grammar of Boyer, a refugee in England, obtained, at this time, a considerable circulation. Indeed, there seemed to be a kind of historic necessity for a closer observation of English institutions, and a more extended study of the English language and literature, at this period. The spirit of the seventeenth century, which had survived into the eighteenth, was dying out. The reign of the *Grand Monarque* was closed. The works of his hands were falling into decay. France, which had for years been living in the past, began to live in the present, and to think of the future. Changes were gradually, though slowly, going on, which were destined to revolutionize society. Intelligent men, who were scarcely conscious of the movement which carried them and the nation along, began instinctively to look to that land, in which liberty and authority both lived in concord and happiness. They were attracted by her struggles to adjust prerogative and privilege, by her fruitful revolutions, by the steady increase of enlightenment and power among her people, and by all the wonderful events of her marvellous history. They had a real, though an indistinct, feeling that here was a lesson for them; but how its teachings were to be applied, they could not yet see.

It was less than ten years after the residence of Destouches at London that Montesquieu visited that city, and made those observations upon the nature and working of the English Constitution, which enabled him to speak of it so wisely in his noted treatise on the Spirit of Laws. But even before Montesquieu the representative of the *dix-huitième siècle* had been in England, studying the Elizabethan literature, the Newtonian physics, and the Deistic philosophy. Voltaire, the very impersonation of the awakening spirit of his nation, its guide and its apostle for nearly half a century, had spent more than three years in the society of the most distinguished English scholars. Fearing another imprisonment in the Bastille, where he had already been twice confined, he had fled for refuge to London. He found a welcome and a home in the house of Mr. Falkener, a wealthy gentleman, to whom he dedicated *Zaïre*. He made the acquaintance of Congreve and Swift. He studied with admiration the works of Pope;

but the witty Frenchman's brilliant jests and his sharp thrusts at the Roman Catholics made his society uncongenial to the sober and susceptible poet. He attended the funeral of Newton, and saw the corpse of the great man borne to Westminster Abbey, followed by the royal ministers. This tribute of respect paid to intellectual power, and the political influence which was wielded by literary men like Swift and Prior and Addison, left upon his sensitive and ambitious mind strongly marked and lasting impressions. Villemain supposes that, while excited by the recollection of the obsequies of Newton, he threw into his *Henriade* his fine explanation of the system of the universe, and that the famous Ode which Thomson wrote upon the death of the philosopher, is imitated in some lines addressed by Voltaire to Madame du Châtelet several years afterwards. It was amid the stirring and attractive scenes of London life that he pursued those studies which prepared him to undertake at a subsequent period the work of interpreting the philosophy of Newton, and of commending it to the study of his countrymen.

He was much struck, as was Montesquieu, by the freedom and boldness of speech allowed to the preachers, politicians, and journalists. He was at first in daily expectation of the overthrow of the ministry, and even of the monarchy, which was so violently assailed by its opponents. It was here that he stored his mind with those arguments for liberty of thought and of expression, which he afterwards used with such pungency and power. The origin of many of his most dangerous metaphysical and sceptical ideas can be clearly traced to his intercourse with the subtle and fascinating Deists of London.

A person of his taste and temperament could not fail to be interested in the English stage. He had already been fired with the ambition to rival those great masters of dramatic poetry who had lent such a lustre to the golden age of France. At the early age of twenty-four he had brought forth his *Edipe*, which he had written five years earlier. This first effort was crowned with the most brilliant success, and success in that department of literature was then rewarded with the most flattering proofs of enthusiastic admiration

which a poet could receive from the hands of the public. His astonishment at the freedom of the English poets must have been equal to his surprise at the license accorded to politicians. He found himself in a new world. The ideas which he had cherished were unheeded. The traditions which he had respected were almost unknown. The laws of the unities were openly transgressed. The inevitable confidants, the long-winded and declamatory speeches, the nicely balanced verses, with their carefully adjusted cæsuras and their faultless rhymes, were nowhere to be heard. There was a total disregard of those *convenances* which imposed restraints upon the French drama, and determined its whole tone and coloring. The eye of Voltaire was quick to perceive that, with all the seeming lawlessness of the English drama, it possessed a scope, vigor, and power which had not been attained by the artificial works of his countrymen.

He was especially interested in the plays of Shakespeare. He lauded him in his letters and conversation. He made translations from his works. He resolved to introduce some of the characteristics of his pieces into the French drama. It was *avec ravissement*, as he confesses, that he had heard the Brutus of Shakespeare haranguing the Roman people. "I would like," he wrote to Bolingbroke, "to transfer to our stage certain beauties of yours, which has one great merit, that of action." He wished, he said, not to imitate, but to write in the English taste. He wrote the first act of *Brutus*, in English prose, while he was at London. The opening scene presents to us, not an antechamber with two confidants, who are to make long preliminary explanations, but the Roman Senate in session, and the Consuls addressing them in a time of great public distress. The whole act has a freedom and life, which are not to be found in the remainder of the play. Villemain justly remarks that the *Brutus* is more in the style of Addison than of Shakespeare, to whose plays French critics have sometimes compared it.

In the *Eryphile*, which was written two years after the *Brutus*, Voltaire evidently aimed to avail himself of one of Shakespeare's creations, the ghost in Hamlet. But the ghost of Amphiaras, imperfectly conceived, introduced by daylight,

and for the accomplishment of no worthy purpose, and represented upon a stage crowded with spectators, proved to be as much out of place, as a French marquis of the Regency would have been in the play of Hamlet. In *Zaïre*, certainly one of the most brilliant of Voltaire's works, we have his version of the Othello. The resemblance is so close, that we need no confession of the author to assure us that Orosmane is the French picture of the famous Moor. Villemain, in one of his masterly analyses, has shown us how Voltaire endeavored to improve on the original, by depriving it of its coarseness, and adapting it to the refined taste of his times. With a singular keenness of criticism he has laid bare the faults of the youthful poet, and has described with the most appreciative praise the beauties of the English tragedy. *Zaïre* was the first French tragedy in which French characters were introduced, and marked therefore the initiation of the French historical drama. None but classical themes had before been deemed suitable for the dignity of the tragic Muse. But after reading such plays as Henry IV., Henry V., and Richard III., Voltaire ventured to make an innovation upon the established customs of French poets, and to open a fruitful field for himself and his successors. He writes: "It is to the English drama that I owe my boldness in placing on the stage the names of our kings and of the ancient families of the realm. It seems to me that this novelty may be the origin of a kind of tragedy which is as yet unknown to us, and which we need."

We must not suppose that Voltaire wished to imitate blindly even Shakespeare. He was shocked by much which he saw in the English drama. He always remained a Frenchman, and never wholly escaped from the literary traditions of the age of Louis XIV. In his *Lettres sur les Anglais*, which were written during his sojourn in London, and soon after his return to Paris, he expresses his opinions of the great poet, many of whose beauties he was incapable of perceiving. In his eighteenth Letter he says:—

"Shakespeare created the English drama; his genius was full of power and fertility, of naturalness and sublimity, without the least spark of good taste, and without the least knowledge of rules. . . . He has some very fine scenes, some very grand and terrible passages,

scattered through his monstrous farces, which are called tragedies. It is to be regretted that no one has translated any of the striking passages, which atone for his faults."

In *La Mort de César*, Voltaire has perhaps copied the most closely from an English original. He translated whole scenes of Shakespeare's Julius Cæsar, and studied them over and over again. He wrote to the Abbé Desfontaines, about the time that his piece was printed: "Our stage is destitute of action and of great interests. If you had seen Shakespeare played as I have, and nearly as I have translated him, our declarations of love and our confidants would appear to you poor in comparison." And yet he endeavored to polish and correct the work of the master by reducing it to classical proportions, and purging it of repulsive barbarisms. A critical estimate of the comparative merits of the uncorrected and the corrected play is foreign to our purpose. We are only indicating the influence of the Englishman upon the Frenchman. *La Mort de César* was the first French tragedy in which the populace were represented upon the stage. This valuable addition to the French drama was entirely due to Shakespeare. Soon we find Voltaire in his *Alzire* introducing Americans and Spaniards to the public, in order to show the contrast between savage and civilized life. The horizon of the drama has been widened. It reaches to barbarous climes. The destinies and characteristics of nations, rather than the amours and petty quarrels of a royal household, now arrest our attention.

A few years later, our poet borrows the theme of *La Prude* from Wycherley's Plain-Dealer. In the Preface to *Semiramis* he advocates the removal of spectators from the stage, and refers to the magnificent and spacious theatres of London. The *Semiramis* is a *rechauffé* of *Eryphile*, and the unlucky ghost is again introduced, and defended by the example of Hamlet. Another innovation is observed, which must have come from England. The scenery is changed in the middle of an act.

It must not be supposed that Destouches and Voltaire alone experienced the influence of English ideas. At the same time that Voltaire was in England, the Abbé Prévost

was also there in exile. He remained in London several years, and there commenced the publication of a literary journal, *Le Pour et Le Contre*. In its pages, according to M. Saint-Beuve, "English literature was fully considered. There were to be found detailed notices of Roscommon, Rochester, Den- nis, Wycherley, and Savage, intelligent and copious analyses of Shakespeare, and a translation of Dryden's *Mark Antony*." We know, too, that Prévost translated some portions of Richardson's and of Hume's works, and some scenes of Lillo's *George Barnwell*, which was a favorite piece with many of the French. In 1740, Gresset wrote a tragedy, in which for the first time a murder was represented on the French stage. The author justified his course by pointing to the English drama. At length, in 1745, De Laplace had the courage to publish a translation of the *Othello* and the *Third Part of Henry VI.*, with a long preliminary Essay, which was borrowed in part from Pope. His work was very defective. Whole scenes were omitted, and the meaning of many passages was entirely misrepresented. But it was received so favorably, that in 1746 he published a second volume, containing *Richard III.*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, and soon afterward a third volume, with five of the other plays of Shakespeare, and analyses of those which he had not translated in full. In succeeding volumes he gave to the public French versions of several dramas of Otway, of Ben Jonson, and of Beaumont and Fletcher.

Attention seemed to be far more directed to English literature than it had ever been before. Duresnel, a Jesuit, had already attempted a translation of two of Pope's poems. Antoine Yart published a work in eight volumes, entitled *Idée de la Poésie Anglaise*, which contained translations and critical and biographical notices. The President Hénault wrote an historical drama in prose, called *François II.*, which was inspired by Shakespeare's *Henry VI.*, as the author avows in his Preface. It cannot be a merely accidental coincidence, that just about this time the old barrier between French tragedy and comedy was broken down, and that kind of drama was introduced which mingled the comic and the serious in the same piece, as they are actually found in hu-

man life. Doubtless this healthy change was due to the direct or the indirect influence of the English drama, which was becoming so widely diffused among the literary men of France. Diderot, Mercier, and Beaumarchais all wrote attractive and successful works in this style. Saurin chose an English theme in his *Beverley*. De Belloy wrote his *Siège de Calais* with the evident intention of reaching the style of Shakespeare's historical plays, and his *Blanche et Guiscard* in imitation of Thomson. In 1769 Barthe borrowed from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* the subject of his *Fausse In-fidélités*. Everywhere English ideas seemed to be gradually triumphing over the traditions which had so long governed the French stage and French taste. The seeds which Voltaire had sown had quickly sprung up, and if he had cherished their growth, the Romantic revolution of 1827 might perhaps have come in the national literature half a century earlier than it did. But he suddenly became the uncompromising foe of the English drama, and waged war upon it till the day of his death. His correspondence, his contributions to the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, the notes in his edition of Corneille, and a little work called *Du Théâtre Anglais*, evince most clearly his bitter hostility to the great English poet, whom he had vainly endeavored to imitate. He says that the author of Hamlet is a savage, and that he is popular in London, because the theatre is there filled with an ignorant rabble, who are fond of dog-fights, duels, and murders. He is enraged that refined Parisians can look on the coarse English pieces with any degree of complacency.

Any one who is acquainted with the character of Voltaire will readily perceive the cause of the sudden change in his sentiments. When he first observed the power of the great English writers, he thought that he had discovered a plan by which he might surpass Racine and Corneille. It had been the fondest dream of his ambition to eclipse the glory of these great masters, whom his nation had so long adored. He tried in vain to excel them in their own style. But on witnessing the enthusiasm of the audiences at the London theatres, he resolved upon an innovation in the French drama, which might give him the ascendancy over the poets of the

age of Louis XIV. He attempted, with some caution, and with a strict regard for most of the prejudices of his time, to infuse into his pieces something of the life and spirit and freedom which lent to the English stage so absorbing an interest. He flattered himself that he was thus giving a new impulse to the national drama. So long as his plays were received with favor, and he was acknowledged to be the leader of the new movement, he was entirely satisfied with his position and his views. But in due time, as we have seen, there arose a group of writers who ventured to borrow more from the English than he had incorporated into his works. Some openly attacked the time-honored unities. They were not content to temper the ancient style with precisely the amount of English spirit which he regarded as safe and judicious. His advice was unheeded, his mandates were contemned. Those who might in some sense be considered as his disciples and imitators had so far outstripped him in zeal for the new ideas which he had suggested, that they no longer looked on him as a teacher and a model. His pride was wounded. He doubtless was also sincerely opposed to the excessive changes which many were disposed to introduce into the drama. He feared, too, lest, having given them their first incitement, he should be confounded with them, and be utterly condemned by the highest arbiters of taste. He therefore remonstrated against their folly, and employed all his wit and skill in attacking the poet from whom they drew their inspiration.

His indignation seemed to reach its climax, when Letourneur published his translation of Shakespeare. That work was dedicated to the king, subscribed for by the queen and the princesses, and received with great approbation by the public. Voltaire's rage knew no bounds. He wrote to D'Argental about Letourneur: —

“The blood tingles in my veins in speaking of him. If he has not enraged you, I regard you as a man without feeling. What is frightful is that the monster has a party in France, and, to complete the calamity and horror, it is I who first talked of this Shakespeare; it is I who first showed to the French a few pearls which I had found in his enormous dung-heap. I did not expect that I should thus be instrumental

at some day in trampling under foot the crowns of Racine and Corneille, in order to adorn the brow of a savage actor with them."

Voltaire even determined to bring the subject before the Academy. He announces his purpose to M. de Vaines as follows: "Le 25 du mois, je combats en champ clos, sous les étendards de M. d'Alembert, contre Gilles Letourneur, écuyer de Gilles Shakspeare." He writes to La Harpe, after exhorting him to fight the battle of good taste: "Il faudra se laver les mains après cette bataille, car vous aurez combattu contre des gadouards. Je ne m'attendais pas que la France tomberait un jour dans l'abîme d'ordures où on l'a plongée; voilà l'abomination de la désolation dans le lieu saint! Rymer a eu bien raison de dire que Shakspeare n'était qu'un vilain singe." D'Alembert writes, on the 20th of August, 1776: "Enfin, mon cher maître, voilà la bataille engagée et le signal donné. Il faut que Shakspeare ou Racine demeure sur la place. Je crierai dimanche en allant à la charge: Vive Saint Denis Voltaire, et meure George Shakspeare!" At last Voltaire's papers were read before the Academy by D'Alembert. They presented no new views. While acknowledging that Shakespeare had some happy ideas, they described him as a rude mountebank, who was totally ignorant of the proprieties of the drama. They provoked discussion, but made no converts to the sentiments of the author. He became more and more enraged. He exhausted his large vocabulary of abusive epithets upon Shakespeare and Letourneur, most frequently speaking of the former as "Gilles couvert de lambeaux." He closes his letter of October 22d, 1776, to D'Alembert, with these words: "Je vais achever d'étriller Shakspeare." Lady Elizabeth Montague entered the lists against him, and wrote a spirited little work, which was at once translated into French. Voltaire defended himself against her with his usual adroitness, but he smarted long under the wound which she gave him by asserting that "it was to the dung-heap of Shakespeare that Voltaire owed the best part of his grain." His *Lettre à l'Académie* was the final effort that he made to stay the tide of barbarism which, he thought, was sweeping over the land. His sorrow was fortunately forgotten during the last few days of his life in the joys of his triumph at the representation of *Irène*.

But what would have been his feelings, could he have foreseen that his seat in the Academy would be filled by Ducis, whose whole fame was derived from his imitations of Shakespeare's plays? It must be confessed that Ducis succeeded but indifferently in his adaptations of the English plays to the requirements of French taste. But his *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, helped to direct public attention to the works of the English poet. It is a fact, perhaps worthy of notice, that the great *Encyclopédie* contained an article in which were remarks highly laudatory of the genius of Shakespeare. It ranked him above all the other dramatic poets of Europe.

Among those contemporaries of Voltaire who were friendly to the works of the English dramatists, was Sedaine, who had the wisdom to say, that "he who had taken only *Zaire* from *Othello* had left the best part." His *Philosophe sans le Savoir* and *Maillard* show clearly that he had learned something from the great English master, whom he almost adored. He had a susceptibility to the beauties which he could not imitate. Arnaud de Bacular, a novelist and poet, prefixed to a drama, *Le Comte de Comminge*, three preliminary Essays, in which he set forth very clearly, and commended most earnestly, some of the distinctive merits of Shakespeare. But the man who most boldly attacked the ancient literary canons of his country, and defended the English theories, was Sebastien Mercier, author of an *Essai sur l'Art Dramatique*. He knew the plays of Shakespeare by heart. He called the poet *his* Shakespeare. He not only admired him, but had a contempt for Corneille and Racine. He assumed most of the positions which the Romantic School adopted sixty years afterwards. Like many others, he was more sound in theory than successful in practice. He imitated *Romeo and Juliet* in his *Tombeaux de Vérone*, and *Timon of Athens* in a play with the same title. Déjaure, one of his contemporaries, imitated *Cymbeline* in his *Imogène*. We have already spoken of Letourneur. With the aid of the Count of Catuelan and Fontaine-Malherbe he brought forth the translation of Shakespeare's Works, in twenty volumes, between the years 1776 and 1782. Though he improved upon De Laplace, he failed

to give an adequate idea of the original. Yet he introduced Shakespeare to a large and intelligent circle, who had never studied him before. He also made translations from Young, Hervey, Ossian (or Macpherson), Richardson, and other English writers, whose works were sought by numerous readers.

Voltaire was not alone in his opposition to Letourneur and Shakespeare. His disciples, Marmontel and La Harpe, both echoed his words, and M. J. Chénier reviled the great poet, from whose Julius Cæsar he borrowed the material for his *Brutus et Cassius*. He not only borrowed from it, but spoiled it, and then abused the man whom he had so unprofitably robbed.

At length the discussions upon the unities and the comparative merits of English and of French literature were arrested by the great civil revolution of 1789. For some time the tragedies upon the streets were the only ones which engaged the public attention. But in the partial repose of the last years of the century the stage was filled with comedies and vaudevilles, which did not by any means conform to the classical rules. They were, in some sort, an instinctive protest against the usages of the past. They satisfied the desire for a drama which should reflect the liberty and daring of that remarkable age.

But Napoleon laid his iron hand upon literature, as upon everything else. Its life was apparently stifled. For many years no great poem appeared in the Empire. But the French mind was not utterly paralyzed. The less it could say for itself, the more it was inclined to listen to the words of Germany and England. Madame de Staël, banished from her "Rue du Bac," undertook to make her countrymen acquainted with the German mind. She found herself necessarily led to the consideration of that English literature which had been so largely instrumental in determining the growth of the German. Her glowing and enthusiastic praises of Shakespeare directed her readers to his works; and once more the war between the Classic and the Romantic School was opened, to continue for many years. The general tendency was in favor of the latter party, but there were some signs of activity upon the other side. Lemer cier, a third-rate

poet, persisted most assiduously in endeavoring to give to his country a national drama, which should possess some of the characteristics of the English; but his efforts were crowned with very indifferent success. In 1806 Hennem published his *Poétique Anglaise*, in three volumes, which was a far more complete work of its kind than had before appeared. It gave sketches of the principal poets, and choice extracts from their writings. It increased very much the taste for English literature. Chateaubriand, in one of his essays, acknowledges his indebtedness to this compilation.

The great organ of the conservative school was the *Journal des Débats*, and the leader of it was Geoffroy, a man who had a deadly hatred for everything which did not conform to classical ideas. To him the eighteenth century was more terrible than the Dark Ages, and the English were more barbarous than the ancient Gauls. In examining Hamlet, the first question which he asks is, "Did Shakespeare know Sophocles?" and the judgment upon it is, "Hamlet is a barbarous composition, in which we discover no trace of the ideas and manners of Sophocles." With such a spirit he reviewed the dramatic literature of his time. The Shakespearian drama had no more uncompromising or influential foe than he. The feuilletons of the *Journal des Débats* from 1800 to 1810 formed the armory from which all the classical combatants drew their weapons for many years. Lemerrier, with his measure of ability, opposed many of the arguments of Geoffroy in 1810-11 from his professional chair in the *Athénée*.

In 1809 Benjamin Constant translated Schiller's Wallenstein, and prefixed to it some remarks, in which he timidly criticised the ancient French schools. The works of Buffon, of J. J. Rousseau, and of St. Pierre, by leading men away from conventional and artificial life to the contemplation and love of nature, doubtless favored the cultivation of the bold and original productions of English literature. Sismondi's *Littérature du Midi de l'Europe* carried the minds of the French beyond the confines of their nation, and commended to them also a dramatic theory, which disregarded the unities of time and place. Wilhelm Schlegel, too, interpreted Shakespeare to the Continental mind, and attracted the attention

of even prejudiced Frenchmen to the poetic wealth which he spread before them. He came to Paris in 1813 or 1814, and supervised the translation of his *Lectures on Dramatic Literature*, which he had delivered at Vienna in 1809. He and his brother often met Benjamin Constant, Sismondi, M. de Barante, the Danish poet Oehlenschläger, Madame de Stael, and other distinguished characters, at Coppet, and there they discussed the questions which were agitating the literary world. The most thoughtful minds were thus prepared to seek for a wider liberty in their forms of expression, and for the intelligent appreciation of foreign ideas, as soon as the downfall of Napoleon enabled them to gratify their natural desires. Byron was read with the deepest interest. The romances of Walter Scott were translated into French, as soon as they appeared, and they ultimately gave rise to a school of imitators. His *Essay upon the Drama* aided in effecting the great change which soon followed in the dramatic system of France.

In 1820 M. le Comte de Gain-Montaignac published three plays, which were intended to be in the free and bold style of the English and the Germans. They were reviewed by M. de Rémusat, who argued that the time for a reform in the drama had come. He showed that the public had grown weary of the limited range of themes which could be treated, and combinations which could be introduced, according to the principles that then prevailed. He did not recommend the entire adoption of the foreign theories, but he thought that in certain particulars they were worthy of careful study. Most of the dramas which appeared during the last years of the Empire and the first of the Restoration, those of Ancelot, for instance, and Delavigne, and Arnault, and Lebrun, showed a tendency to depart from the ancient rules, to neglect the Greek and the Roman themes, and to give animated pictures of modern life.

In 1821 a translation of the complete works of Shakespeare, which was edited by Guizot, De Barante, and Amédée Pichot, was given to the public. These distinguished scholars revised the ancient version of Letourneur, and accompanied it with appreciative criticisms and explan-

atory notes. Guizot's *Essay on the Life and Works of Shakespeare* was by far the ablest production which had appeared in France upon that subject. Starting with the assertion that the genius of Shakespeare was universally acknowledged, he sets forth the relation of the poet to his times and to the English drama, and examines the peculiarities of his writings. He proves that there is no greater error than to suppose that Shakespeare is not an artist in the highest and best sense of the term. He convicts those who charge him with lawlessness and rudeness of profound ignorance as to the true spirit of his dramas. He pleads that unity of expression is the prime secret of the dramatic art, and that, if Shakespeare has discovered other means of attaining that end than those which the French have employed, his success is the unanswerable argument for the legitimacy of his means. He declares that the classical system, as a whole, necessarily died out with the age that produced it, and that with the different spirit of a new age a new form of dramatic expression must arise. It cannot be Corneille's, or Racine's, or Shakespeare's; but Shakespeare, he thinks, furnishes the plan after which genius in the future must work. The new system, he avers, must be broad and free, but not without principles and laws. It must be founded, like liberty, not upon disorder and the forgetfulness of every restraint, but upon laws which it shall frame for itself.

The words of Guizot and his collaborators produced a deep impression upon the literary world. They gave an unprecedented impulse to the study of the English drama. In 1821 Charles Nodier, aided by Mr. Taylor, made a free translation of Maturin's *Bertram*, and in his Preface defended Shakespeare against the attacks of Voltaire and his followers. In 1823 Henri Beyle, known to the literary world by his pseudonyme of *Stendhal*, brought forth his "*Racine and Shakespeare*," a work upon Romanticism and Classicism. He defined the former as the art of presenting to the people such works as, in the present condition of their habits and beliefs, are capable of giving them the highest pleasure possible, and the latter as the art of presenting them with a kind of literature which gave the greatest possible pleasure to their great-grand-

fathers. He maintained that every nation must have a peculiar literature, moulded by its peculiar character, as every man has a coat suited to his own form, and that the new French drama must resemble in many respects that of Shakespeare, because the circumstances of the nation were in many particulars like those of the English in 1590.

The progress of the innovators was so alarming to the conservative Academy, that it was deemed advisable to hold a solemn session, and reaffirm their deep dislike of the new tendencies in literature. Accordingly, on the 24th of April, 1823, M. Auger mounted their tribune, and reiterated substantially what Voltaire had there said forty-five years before. The Academy voted that Shakespeare was a barbarian, and, having thus discharged their duty to their national literature, duly adjourned. The Classicists proclaimed through the public prints that Romanticism was dying. But they fought it as though it had some vigorous life. Dussault, the editor of the *Journal des Débats*, wrote numerous articles, which were thought worthy of being subsequently collected into a work of five volumes. Viennet, Jouy, and others, continually attacked Shakespeare through the journal called *Le Miroir*. We in this country, who expend most of our enthusiasm in political discussions, can have little idea of the animosity with which this literary warfare was carried on in France. The Romantic party gained ground every year. Most of the new dramas and vaudevilles were not constructed on the ancient models. Their very titles, such as "Julien, ou 25 Ans d'Entr'acte," and "Trente Ans dans la Vie d'un Joueur," showed that the laws of the unities were deliberately violated.

In 1824 Lemercier borrowed, partly from Shakespeare's Richard III., but chiefly from Rowe's Jane Shore, the materials for his Richard III., which was the last and one of the best of the pieces that he wrote avowedly in the style of the English. At about this time several of the plays of Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller were translated or imitated, and thus indirectly the influence of the English literature was extended. The publisher, Ladvocat, issued a series of translations of foreign plays, in twenty-six volumes, which contained a notice of each author, and of the peculiar features of each

national drama. Many of the ablest men in France were engaged upon the work, and among them Andrieux, De Rémusat, Guizot, Charles Nodier, Amédée Pichot, Villemain, Lebrun, and De Barante. So great was the demand for it, that it fully remunerated the enterprising publisher. A counterfeit edition was also published at Brussels.

In 1824, M. de Barante, who had already translated Schiller, and written critical articles upon Lessing and Otway, published a small work on Hamlet, in which he lauded its truthfulness and beauty. In the same year was established the journal called *Le Globe*, which became the organ of the new school. Victor Hugo, De Vigny, Sainte-Beuve, Emile Deschamps, Vitet, De Rémusat, and numerous less distinguished, but not less zealous colleagues, contributed to its columns, and influenced the public sentiment. In 1825, M. Prosper Mérimée, employing the name of Joseph l'Estrange, wrote dramas which entirely disregarded the unities. In 1826, M. de Sorsum translated five of Shakespeare's plays into prose, blank verse, and rhymes, following strictly the form of the original. He published only four of them, the *Tempest*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, and *Midsummer Night's Dream*. They were not received with much favor. In 1827, English actors from Covent Garden, Drury Lane, and Dublin represented the plays of Shakespeare in Paris to large and enthusiastic audiences. Whole editions of the pieces which they acted were quickly sold. Four years before, a company of English players had been hissed from the stage, and almost driven from the city.

In 1827, M. Sainte-Beuve commenced the publication of his *Tableau de la Poésie Française au XVI^{me} Siècle*, in the *Globe*. He endeavored to apply the lessons derived from the study of that age to the literary questions of his own time, and often found occasion to commend the works of Shakespeare, and the movements of the Romantic School. It was in October that the first decisive blow of what has been called the literary revolution of 1827 was struck by Victor Hugo. The Preface to his play of *Cromwell* entered fully into the consideration of the principles which govern all poetry, and especially the drama. It proclaimed in the most unqualified terms,

and with all the glowing ardor of the young poet's style, the absolute necessity of departing from the ancient models, which had so long been copied in France. It pointed to Shakespeare as the highest and most complete personification of dramatic genius. It provoked the fiercest discussion. The battle between the members of Hugo's club, *Le Cénacle*, and the conservatives, was long and bitter. But the young reformers were at last victorious.

In less than a year after the appearance of *Cromwell*, Soulié's *Romeo et Juliette*, and M. d'Epagny's *Lancaster, ou l'Usurpation*, were placed upon the stage of the Odeon. The former play was in five acts and in verse, and was an avowed imitation of Shakespeare's piece. The latter claimed to be the first regular romantic work in which comedy was mingled with the drama. Five years later, its author wrote *Les Malcontents de 1579*, and thanked the public for having "comprehended and approved the introduction of the new style." The brilliant lectures which Villemain gave, in the years 1827 and 1828, carried the minds of his countrymen beyond the boundaries of their land, and especially aided them in appreciating the great masterpieces of English genius. He showed the vast superiority of Shakespeare to his French imitators, passed in review all the great English writers of the eighteenth century, and explained the interdependence of the English and the French literature. In June, 1828, MM. Guizot, Guizard, De Rémusat, and others, founded the *Revue Française*, which advocated the same principles as the *Globe*. So great was the interest in English literature that M. Charles Coquerel was induced to write a history of it for his countrymen.

In 1829, M. Vitet published three historical dramas; Alexandre Dumas, his *Henri III.* and *Christine de Suède*; Alfred de Vigny, his translation of *Othello*, and his *Letter upon a Dramatic System*; M. Emile Deschamps, his *Etudes Poétiques Françaises et Étrangères*; Charles Nodier, his *Observations pour servir à l'Histoire de la nouvelle Ecole littéraire*; and Hugo, his *Marion Delorme* and *Hernani*. Seven of the Academicians were so alarmed at the progress of the new school, that they petitioned the king to forbid the use of

the Théâtre Français for the representation of the Romantic dramas. Their unreasonable request was refused. In March, 1830, *Hernani* was played, with entire success, though it had been much changed since it first left the author's hands.

The Revolution of 1830, which perhaps the Romanticists helped to hasten, opened for them a fairer field of action. They were filled with enthusiasm. They obtained the warmest sympathy of the public. They multiplied their works. De Vigny gave his beautiful drama, *La Maréchale d'Ancre*, in June, 1831. In August, Hugo's *Marion Delorme* was played. In the same year Dumas wrote his *Antony* and his *Richard d'Arlington*. Casimir Delavigne, who had halted between two theories, and had vainly attempted to reconcile what was irreconcilable, gradually approached the now popular and dominant party. In 1832, Hugo published his *Le Roi s'amuse* and his *Lucrèce Borgia*. Romanticism soon became a fashion, and then it was speedily shorn of its glory. A multitude of indifferent and despicable playwrights filled the stage with tasteless and disgusting scenes of horror, bloodshed, and indecency, and brought contempt upon the cause which they professed to serve.

But notwithstanding the injuries which it has received from its avowed friends, something of its spirit has prevailed in the French drama down to the present time. Classical plays are still written, and the great works of Corneille and Racine are still admired; but the public taste generally demands something of the force and freshness of the modern school. Imitations and translations of English plays, and particularly of Shakespeare's, are continually appearing. George Sand, who has shown herself an earnest student of Shakespeare, has recently adapted his "As You Like It" to the French stage, and her arrangement has been played at the Théâtre Français, which was once thought to be desecrated by the approach of the English barbarian. François Victor Hugo has cheered the hours of his exile by translating the Sonnets of Shakespeare. Cheap editions of the translation of the great dramatist's writings find larger and larger sales. Though he is still *le vieux Gilles* to a few prejudiced and antiquated Academicians, who feed upon the traditions of

former times, and though he is not appreciated by the great mass of the people, he is constantly becoming more fully understood by the most intelligent classes.

We have dwelt almost exclusively upon the influence of the English dramatists, for, if we except philosophy, the influence of all other departments of English literature on the French has been subsidiary to that of the drama. It is true that the Baconian, the Newtonian, the Sensational, and the Deistic philosophy were reproduced from England, and promulgated on the Continent by the French, and thus all their writings during the last half of the eighteenth century were tinged with the coloring of English thought; but we could not attempt in this paper to discuss with any degree of fulness the relations between the English and the French metaphysics. Though the lyric and the epic poetry and the novels of England have been more or less read upon the other side of the Channel, they have not made much impression on the character of French literature. Yet Thomson, Young, Milton, and Byron have each found admirers, and some imitators. Richardson was compared by Diderot to Sophocles, to Euripides, and even to Homer. J. J. Rousseau says: "On n'a jamais fait encore, en quelque langue que ce soit, de roman égal à *Clarisse*, ni même approchant." Not a few passages of his *Héloïse* remind the reader of Richardson, and all his works betray his familiarity with the writings of Locke. He and Diderot once projected a paper which was to resemble the *Spectator*; but it was never actually established. Lessing says that Voltaire's *Nanine* is only a dramatized Pamela. Napoleon's love of Ossian gave for a time a great currency to the works attributed to that imaginary poet. The flatterers of the Emperor compared him to the lofty heroes of whom the Scottish bard had sung. The poetry which was heard at court was naturally affected by this circumstance; but that poetry forms no part of the permanent literature of the country. Walter Scott's novels called forth numerous historical novels of varied excellence, but none worthy to be compared with the original.

English literature was never so extensively studied in France as it is at the present day. A large portion of the

best productions, not only of the English press, but also of our own, are translated as soon as they are published, and are read by appreciating and friendly minds. Able, and for the most part impartial, reviews of them appear in the standard magazines. The peculiar characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon mind are more clearly understood every year, and therefore the extent to which our ideas of artistic form are suited to the nature of French thought is more accurately determined. The wisest Frenchmen are perceiving that, while our rich and diversified literature deserves their earnest and serious study, its original and natural modes of expression are not always adapted to their wants. The old Classical party were bigoted and foolish in refusing to see any grace or truthfulness in the Elizabethan drama. The extremists in the Romantic party were injudicious in proclaiming that all beauty was to be found in the works of Shakespeare. Time and experience have now abundantly proved that there is something in the very mental constitution of the French which seeks for other conceptions of dramatic excellence than those which are admired in London or in Boston. From the time of Voltaire to the time of Hugo, the new school has produced no plays which have been for a series of years witnessed with a sustained interest. Partisan excitement or a passing fashion has sustained certain pieces for a while, but a Romantic national drama, which shall be to France what the Elizabethan is to England, remains to be created. Yet the influence of the English dramatic works upon the life and thought of France has been neither small nor unhappy. They have suggested to scholars questions of vital interest. They have incited mental activity. They have furnished new ideas. They have given greater breadth and strength to every branch of literature. They have infused the spirit of English manliness and freedom into many a heart. They have taught a large class of the noblest Frenchmen to remember England, not as the *perfidious Albion*, but as the birthplace and home of revered masters of song. They have strengthened that goodly fellowship of letters which survives the hatreds and warfares of armies, and helps to "make the whole world kin."